

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8946

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: LEFTWINGER ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF PARLIAMENTARY
LABOR PARTY

1. IAN MIKARDO WAS YESTERDAY (MARCH 21) ELECTED CHAIRMAN
OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP). BY FAR THE
MOST LEFT WING OF THE FIVE CANDIDATES FOR THE POST,
HE WON ONLY 99 OF THE 272 VOTES CAST, BUT TOPPED THE
POLL AS THE RIGHT WING AND MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD VOTE
WAS SPLIT AMONG HIS FOUR OPPONENTS. ARTHUR BOTTOMLEY,
FORMER COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY, CAME SECOND WITH 85
VOTES. THE OTHER CANDIDATES WERE FRED WILLEY (41 VOTES),
TOM URWIN (27), AND WILLIE HAMILTON (20). THE VACANCY
WAS CAUSED BY THE RETIREMENT OF DOUGLAS HOUGHTON WHO
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HAD HELD THE POST SINCE 1967.

2. MIKARDO, AGED 65, HAS BEEN AN MP SINCE 1945 EXCEPT DURING THE 1959-64 PARLIAMENT. HE HAS ALSO BEEN A MEMBER OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SINCE 1950, EXCEPT FOR THE YEAR 1959-60. HE WAS CHAIRMAN OF THE LABOR PARTY, 1970-71, AND IN THAT CAPACITY CHAIRED THE SPECIAL PARTY MEETING CALLED IN 1971 TO DISCUSS THE COMMON MARKET. HIS PLATFORM MANNER IS REMINISCENT OF THE LATE SENATOR EVERETT DIRKSEN, BUT HIS POLITICS ARE AT THE EXTREME LEFT OF THE PLP. HE RUNS AN IMPORT-EXPORT BUSINESS THAT HAS EXTENSIVE DEALINGS WITH EASTERN EUROPE, AND IS REPORTEDLY QUITE WEALTHY.

3. COMMENT: THE PLP CHAIRMAN PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN MAINTAINING LIAISON BETWEEN LABOR'S BACKBENCHERS AND THE LEADERSHIP. MIKARDO IS EXPECTED TO BE A FORCEFUL SPOKESMAN FOR THOSE WHO WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO PRESS AHEAD WITH ALL ITS ELECTION MANIFESTO PROMISES, AND WHO WILL NOT ACCEPT ITS MINORITY POSITION AS AN EXCUSE FOR DOING LESS.

4. MIKARDO'S CANDIDACY WAS SPONSORED BY THE LEFT WING TRIBUNE GROUP. A PARTY OFFICIAL HAS TOLD US THAT ARTHUR LATHAM (WHO, LIKE MIKARDO, IS A TRIBUNE MEMBER) PROPOSED AT THE MARCH 14 MEETING OF THE PLP THAT ONLY ONE BALLOT SHOULD BE USED TO ELECT THE CHAIRMAN -- "IN THE INTERESTS OF SAVING TIME" -- AND THE PERSON GETTING THE MOST VOTES DECLARED WINNER. THE PROPOSAL WAS ACCEPTED BEFORE MOST MPS AT THE MEETING REALIZED ITS IMPLICATIONS. HAD A MAJORITY VOTE BEEN REQUIRED, AS USUAL, IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT ARTHUR BOTTOMLEY WOULD HAVE WON ON A SECOND RUN-OFF BALLOT.

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